

I remember a cartoon strip where a little boy, Baby Grumplin is walking to church with his sister Maisie and the conversation goes like this, "If I pray very hard I'll get everything I want won't I Maisie?" "Well everything within reason." "Here what's this within reason lark? Ask and thou shalt receive is what it says!" Maisie responds "Oh I shall lose patience I shall. It means ask for something proper something unselfish, something within reason. To which Baby Grumplin replies "I knew I should have read the small print."

Basically we may say yes prayer is good but we have questions. How we do it? Am I using the right words? What can we ask for and what can't we? Does God answer? If we have questions about prayer then this passage in Luke 11.1-13 provides us with some of the answers but more it encourages us to get on and pray. That in turn is part of how we grow as Christians and how we grow together as Christians. So as we continue to work out our verse for the year, "As you come to him, the living stone, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:4-5), the rest of the summer we will be looking at practical things to help us grow as disciples and help us grow together. The topics are taken from John White's book 'The Fight' and today we think about prayer.

1. An example that incites v1

Seeing other people do things can encourage us can't it? A couple of weekends ago, at the party for the Queen's 90th birthday, when the ice cream van pulled up someone went and got an ice cream and then others saw and followed suit. That's what seems to happen here. The disciples see Jesus in prayer and want to pray. This wasn't the first occasion on which the disciples had seen Jesus at prayer. We are not told how often and when he prayed but simply in verses like 5.16 that he often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. The disciples noticed this and through such times the disciples saw that prayer was important to Jesus. You could say they saw his life was centred upon prayer. But they also saw that prayer came before important times. As we read Luke's gospel we see Jesus praying before selecting his disciples, before revealing himself as the Messiah. If prayer was essential for Jesus in the general run of life and at key moments then these disciples could see that was essential for them and indeed we should see that prayer is essential for us. Is it essential for us as individual Christians and for us as a church? So let me ask how does prayer feature in our lives? Is it central? In other words does our life revolve around prayer? One of the problems for us with the idea of a daily quiet time of Bible reading and prayer is that we can actually take prayer away from the centre of life. A few minutes in the morning or evening and then we can get on with living the day. Isn't that how it goes?

If prayer was essential to Jesus and central to his life and ministry and is to be with ours then simply one little slot cannot be enough. Rather it should spread through the day and

into every area. Prayer as we get up, as we go to work, as we meet with someone, as we approach a new situation, as we start a new phase of the day, as we sit down to eat or lay our heads on our pillows. The recognition of God in each part brings prayer into the centre of our lives. Then of course prayer should come before those big events, those large decisions. But this is not just for us as individuals but also as a church. Prayer should be central to our life as a church and the ministry of our church. I know we have prayer in each service and prayer meetings most weeks and yet I still feel that prayer is not central. I think it is something we need to keep working on.

Here we see Jesus at prayer that should stir us not just to think or ask about prayer but to prayer itself. Jesus needed to pray and so do we.

2. prayer is speaking to our Father v2-4

So what did Jesus teach them? Well he gave them a prayer which has become so well known and used, though I am not sure he gave the prayer to be used parrot fashion.

The overriding thing Jesus taught about prayer is about God. Back in 10.21f Jesus had introduced the idea of God as Father and the whole of his understanding of prayer is based upon that. Prayer is about coming to God who yes is sovereign, working out his will and building his kingdom according to his own sovereign will and by his own power, who is holy and needs to be acknowledged as such but who is gracious and who relates to us as a father relates to his children. Prayer is about relationship and about speaking to a Father. Now in relation to that we need to be

3. getting our perspective right v5-8, 11-13

I understand that there is talk of a sequel to Mary Poppins. In the original we see Mr Banks and something of his relationship with his children. We see how, at the end of the day, they are brought in to him to be patted on the head and sent to bed. But seem unable to really speak to him.

With God as “our Father” how should we view him?

Through the ages there have been different views of a father and our experiences of our fathers may have been different. So what did Jesus mean when he used those words, “When you pray say “Father””?

The reason behind the use of “father” is to encourage us to speak to God. So we have this little parable in vs5-8. Basically what Jesus was saying to his disciples was, can you imagine a friend who refuses to help you to provide hospitality when another friend arrives unexpectedly? The question demands the answer no because in their culture it couldn't happen. It couldn't happen simply because of friendship. What Jesus was showing was that God is greater than our friends and because of our new found friendship with him when we ask in prayer he will answer because he is our friend, he is our Father. Get the perspective right. We can speak to God and with an expectancy that he will answer. More than that what he gives is good. In vs11-13 the comparison is made with human

fathers. They give good not bad things to their children so how much more will our heavenly Father give us good things indeed he gives his children the very best gift and that is the gift of the Holy Spirit, God in us. To see how that worked out we need to wait for Luke's second volume, Acts. However these verses help us to get our perspective on God and prayer right. In that, as we come to God in prayer and as we ask him for things, we know his disposition towards us is favourable and we know that the way he will answer us will be for our good.

4. Just do it v9-10

"So I say to you". What does Jesus have to say to his disciples who have come to him and asked him to teach them about prayer? He tells them to ask, to knock, to seek. Just do it. Just get on with prayer. Don't spend hours questioning how prayer works. Don't spend time wondering how to frame a prayer. Just ask God.

Jesus encourages his disciples to ask. Frequently I hear Christians say of course prayer shouldn't be a shopping list. I can understand what people are saying. However Jesus says here - give us, forgive us, don't lead us, ask, seek, knock, how much more will your Father in heaven give.... Let's get this right. Prayer is about God as Father and us as his children who are dependent upon him and God both expects us to ask and wants us to ask. Jesus was asked 'teach us to pray' and what did he teach - ask. I don't know about you but if Jesus says something I tend to think he knows what he is talking about. Jesus said "ask". So don't be afraid to ask is it what children do and our heavenly Father longs to hear us ask and delights to answer.

If you are not too sure about asking then listen to your children or grandchildren and learn from them. God our heavenly Father wants us who are his children to ask.

So let's ask and let's not worry about the style of language we use. We don't have to use 'thee' and 'thou' nor do we have to use big words. We just talk to God as a child speaks to a parent.

Richard Wurmbrand who was a Rumanian Christian pastor and imprisoned for his faith tells of a Russian officer coming to see him for confession. The man had no religious background but longed for God. Having been told the death and resurrection stories the man danced around the room in happiness. He was encouraged to pray and not knowing any prayers or holy phrases what he said translates as "O God what a fine chap you are! If I were you and you were me I would never have forgiven you your sins. But you are a really nice chap! I love you with all my heart."

What God our father longs for is for his children to chatter to him as we tell him our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears, our wishes and anxieties.

Jesus shows us that prayer is important. He helps us see the key relationship with our Heavenly Father at the heart of prayer and that as our Father he will hear and respond to our prayers in ways that are only good for us. As a result of all that Jesus encourages his disciples to ask God in prayer! So what are you going to do as a result of hearing God speak this morning? Hopefully you are going to take what Jesus said to heart and you are going to pray.

John White in his book 'The Fight' writes this, "When I was a medical student in England someone in the Inter-Varsity group gave me a card which changed my life. The card was impressive. It was pale green deepening to dark green at the edges. On it were a couple of quotations from the gospels indicating how Jesus, on earth, once spent all night in prayer. Underneath the texts was one brief sentence ending, "...God helping me I resolve to spend at least twenty minutes daily in prayer to God." Below was a dotted line where I signed my name."

Now that might seem a bit artificial but friends is that not what we all need? Do we not all need to commit ourselves to prayer? Jesus did do we not also need to pray? Of course we do. The one thing we all need to take away from today is the encouragement and commitment to pray. Just do it! But then what should we pray? You are going to ask your heavenly Father, but for what? For yourself that you would grow closer to Jesus, for your friends that they might know Jesus, for our church that we might grow together in Jesus, for our town that people might hear about Jesus, for our world that God would bring healing hope and peace. These are only headlines I have no idea what faces you in your personal life, what battles you face in which you need God's strength. I don't know how things are in your family and the needs there you might bring to God. I don't know what faces you at work tomorrow whether work is in or out of the home paid or unpaid. I don't know what other concerns are on your heart and mind. But as with Paul. I know God and his power and grace. I know that "he is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine". God encourages us to pray and he is able both to hear and to answer those prayers.

Going back to the little boy from the start of the sermon. He was going into church with his big sister. "Who does God pray to Masie," he asked. "Nobody baby Grumplin. There's nobody above God. I mean God is the top you should know that," sister replied. "I was just checking," responded the little boy, "there's no point in dealing with middle men!"

God is indeed the top. He is God and he is able to answer all our prayers. So in faith, which is taking God at his word, I do come to him and I pray asking, knocking, seeking knowing he will answer according to his sovereign will and I would encourage all of us to do the same.

I am going to give us time now just to come to God in prayer. If you feel that you really don't know God as your Father and Jesus as your saviour then read the passage again and see what God has to say to you. For others just three or four minutes of silence in which you can ask God for yourself or family or church or world.